

Luke 15:1-7

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28

At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse - a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them.

"For my people are foolish, they do not know me; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good." I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger. (27) For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be desolation; **yet I will not make a full end.** Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back.

Sermon

Today we are encountering the very real challenge of suicide. There is a facebook challenge going around in the last few weeks that encourages people to do 22 pushups on video and then post for 22 days as a way of drawing attention to the number of veterans who commit suicide each day. More recent numbers indicate that it is closer to 20 per day, but that is still 20 too many. According to the American foundation for suicide prevention, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US. Each year nearly 43,000 Americans die by suicide. For every suicide 25 attempt. There are an average of 117 suicides per day with white males accounting for 7 of 10 suicides in 2014.

These statistics can be alarming, even overwhelming to contemplate. Sometimes we need to look at things more nearly. Suzy was a foster sibling of mine, when she was a senior in high school she became pregnant and found herself kicked out of her house. My parents took her in. She survived the trial in her life and went on to college and eventual became a pharmacist. She was married and seemed to have her life on track. So you can imagine the surprise when my parents got the call that she had died, taking her own life.

Chris was a funny, lovable teenager that was a part of the youth group at my church in Peoria, the classic jokester whose smile and joy brought out smiles and laughter and joy in others. It was a shock when I heard that Chris had taken his own life, a freshman in college. It is the only time I have gone back to my previous church.

Fred was a member of the White Lick family. Not able to be here on Sunday morning very often because of his job, Fred was very active in helping through his work as the lead counter for the offering each week. No one was ready for the news that Fred had taken his own life as well.

Suicide touches us all, we all have our stories of loved ones and friends who are no longer with us.

Jeremiah's prophecy in today's text is one of doom. God is over with the idolatry and sins of the people. And the picture that Jeremiah paints with his words is one of desolation, of despair, of no hope. A hot wind that's only purpose is destruction. Darkness, earthquakes, God is unwilling to relent from this course.

And isn't that the definition of depression? Hopelessness, despair, darkness in every corner of our lives. And at best it feels like God is absent, and at worse it feels like God is the cause of the darkness and despair. And if God is against you, how can you stand?

But did you see the light in the midst of Jeremiah's prophecy? Did you see the hope, even though it was just a small spark of light? Verse 27, "For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be desolation; **yet I will not make a full end.**" This is not the end, the story is not over, God is not through with the children of Israel.

In 2013, Amy Bleuel was struggling to find a way to honor her father whom she lost to suicide. That was the genesis of the semicolon project. The semicolon is a symbol for those who have suffered with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide and yet have chosen to put a semicolon in that place instead of a period, because their story is not over.

But there has to be more than doing some pushups or placing a semicolon upon our arms to bring awareness. What else are we called to do in the face of suicide? I think the first thing is awareness - first of the problem and second that the problem is not someone else's problem, but it is ours. Whether it is someone we know or love or it is ourselves, we have been and will be touched by this illness. Next we are called to draw attention to hope. We are never alone. As Christians we believe in a God who is relentless in searching for us when we are lost, and savior who celebrates those who come back from the edge and are reconnected to the community. As individuals and family members, colleagues and friends, we know that we must also recognize that we are not alone in this world either. In an emergency, there are people who are ready to talk with you or anyone you know that is struggling with these thoughts. We need to be willing to call 911 if someone is at risk, we need to be mandatory reporters for the sake of the one going through this illness. Too often we try to go it alone, in our own depression or in our want to help someone else. But we are no more equipped to heal ourselves or a loved one as we are to help fight off cancer without a medical professional. Seek counseling, seek the help of a doctor, you are not alone.

And finally, we need to talk about it. We need to bring this illness out of the darkness and shed some light upon it. This is not the end, Christ is searching for the lost and wanting to rejoice in the found, our story is not over, and we don't want to miss the next chapter.